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the point, stimulate and reconcile, and emphasize the burden and the privilege of living!

Mark Twain's letters seem to contain experience and emotion and thought enough to fill several ordinary lifetimes. Through them one gets the oddest, the most varied glimpses of the spectacle of human life. Through them one is able to share in more events and situations than the most generously planned novel could well be made to contain.

But of Mark Twain in his letters, as in his books, we never weary. His personality never loses its hold upon us, because it is always at work doing for us what it is the chief office of a great personality in literature to do—making life more livable for us by communicating to us its sense of humor and its sense of tragedy.

And so it involves no disparagement of Mark Twain as an artist to place the volumes containing his collected letters among his greatest works.

ADVENTURES AND LETTERS OF RICHARD HARDING DAVIS. Edited by Charles Belmont Davis. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1917.

The presumption that a man so variously experienced, so widely acquainted with all sorts and conditions of men, so keenly observing, as was Richard Harding Davis, must have had much more to tell than he actually did tell in any of his writings intended for the public, is doubtless strong enough in itself to awaken anticipatory interest in his posthumously published letters. But there are not a few who will be drawn to the perusal of Davis's letters by something more than the promise of "adventures" in the title of the volume which contains them. The creator of "Van Bibber" and of "McWilliams" certainly endeared himself to a large public—and especially, perhaps, to that portion of his original public which is now approaching forty years of age. One does not envy the man—if such there is—who in youth could not grow sentimental over *Phroso* or who did not believe, for a time at least, that *Soldiers of Fortune* was the best story ever written. Never to have relished the full flavor of the Van Bibber stories, with their sophistication and their chivalrous sentiment, is to have missed something out of one's life. Romance has a way of fading, to be sure, and perhaps it is inevitable that even those earlier tales of Davis's should lose their freshness—though *Gallagher* turns out, upon re-reading, to be as wonderful a short-story as it originally seemed. At all events, those who fell in love with "Hope Langham" or grinned over "McWilliams" in their teens received an emotional stimulus very nearly as wholesome as it was pleasurable—an experience that is to be remembered with gratitude.

And so a great many persons who had no acquaintance with Davis will approach the reading of his letters with friendly interest.

Richard Harding Davis as a boy longed to become a writer, and he never thought of any other profession than authorship. "He never," his brother tells us, "even wanted to go to sea, or be a bare-back rider in a circus." He planned his career. After his graduation from Lehigh University he prepared for his life-work by taking special studies in Johns Hopkins, and as soon as his academic training was over he set zestfully about the accumulation of literary material and the acquirement of journalistic experience. In 1886, when he

was twenty-two, he took his first trip to Cuba, with which country he promptly fell in love. After his return to the States he entered newspaper work in Philadelphia, the city of his birth, being employed first by the *Record* and afterwards by the *Press*. Becoming acquainted, in London, with Arthur Brisbane he received from him and accepted the offer of a position upon the *Evening Sun*, and in this paper, during his connection with it, his *Van Bibber* stories were first printed. In 1890 he left the *Sun* to become managing editor of *Harper's Weekly*. By a special arrangement with the Harpers he spent part of his time in editing the *Weekly* and part in traveling and writing special articles. His first trip as a special correspondent was a journey to Texas in 1892, made for the purpose of accompanying the expedition that was looking for the revolutionist Garza, who was supposed to be hiding on this side of the border. This was the beginning of that successful and adventurous career which furnished Davis the materials out of which he wove his brilliant stories of fact and fancy. The letters are rich in the qualities that gave savor to all this author's books. They abound in varied scenes, adventures, types of character, all graphically and familiarly sketched, all touched with humor and with the glow of romance.

Finley Peter Dunne has said that Davis "probably knew more waiters, generals, actors, and princes than any other man who ever lived." In point of fact, he was as fortunate in knowing people of genius as he was happy in his faculty for touch-and-go contact with people of a less permanently desirable type. Among the friends of his father's family, when Richard was a boy, were Mrs. Frances Hodgson Burnett, Mrs. John Drew, Mrs. Barrymore, the Joseph Jeffersons. Booth and Boucicault were frequent visitors at his home. In Davis's early letters "Old Dr. Holmes" figures more than once. Among the persons well known to this promising youth were Henry Irving, Ada Rehan, Ellen Terry, and Augustin Daly—friends who might well do more than stimulate a precocious interest in the stage. As for the interesting people Davis knew in later years—celebrities, tramps, people of rare gifts or merely of picturesque personalities—a list of them would fill pages.

It is pleasant to find the agreeable personal impressions of an author that one has drawn from his writings confirmed by the closer knowledge that his familiar correspondence gives: the discovery that literary quality springs from personality is always freshly satisfying. In Davis's letters one finds the bravely humorous attitude toward life, the generous and chivalric disposition, the immense capacity for enjoyment, and the unstaled love of adventure, that his books evince. One learns, too, that his sentiment sprang from the heart of a genuinely "home-loving and family-loving" American.

It cannot truly be said, however, that these letters are of equal value with the author's best stories either of fiction or of fact. Davis profited by the restraint of form and the reserve which is imposed upon an author. Freed from this, he was witty, imaginative, amusing, but superficial, gossippy, somewhat too facile. Some of his letters rather conspicuously fail to attain that unconscious distinction which sometimes imparts a higher quality to unstudied notes than to formal compositions.